

than tedious multilateralism. They are unlikely to get away with it. Even together they have barely half the population of India, and their nuclear supremacy is largely inapplicable in the really basic issues the world faces — starvation, pollution, terrorism, racial and religious genocide.

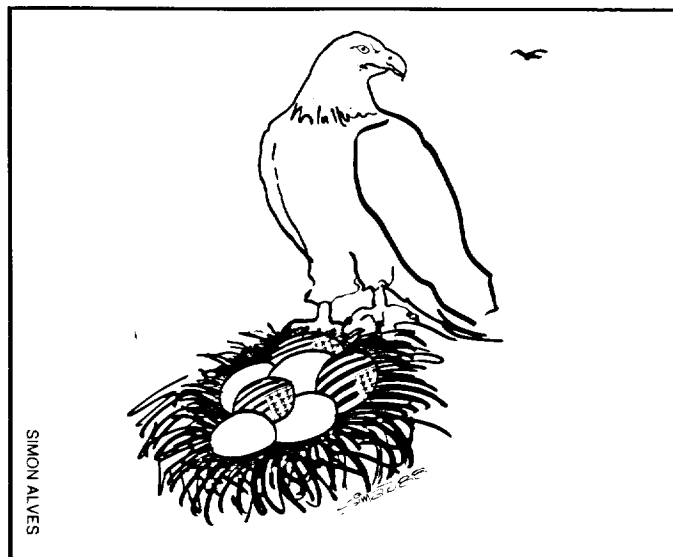
Advantages of being wise

We Canadians fought hard for an appropriate place for lesser powers, but we recognized the special responsibility of the great military powers for security because that seemed the only practical way. There are things, however, that middle powers do best — mediatory diplomacy and peacekeeping, for example. We should be careful, therefore, about railing against the great powers in the abstract. It is not so much their assumption of stewardship as their wisdom in carrying it out that we criticize — an important distinction to make. The same may be said about the US on its own. When they maneuver a Camp David agreement we praise them, but not when they send an American peacekeeping force to Lebanon. Attitudes to the US role can be pretty unreasonable. The almost universal assumption that the US has not only a responsibility but an obligation to run the world can be seen in the complaints made when there is trouble in Cyprus or Panama that the Americans should have prevented. Why they? They are accused of supporting every regime in the world, from Paraguay to Somalia, which they are not actively trying to overthrow. When they do try to overthrow a government they are denounced — and often properly so — for interfering. It seems sometimes that they can do nothing right.

Criticizing American foreign policy with precision is not being anti-American, and we should continue to do so — but with a due measure of forbearance, first trying to grasp the moral and strategic contradictions involved. We have to ask ourselves in each case whether the US is trying to run the world or just finding it hard not to — and there is rarely a straight answer to that question. Personally I would be more assured in my criticisms if I were as confident about what the US should be doing in Central America as I think I am about what they should stop doing.

A problem for the American Empire is that the rest of the world is obsessively preoccupied with what they do or do not do. Canadians, for example persistently judge our foreign policy in terms of whether or not we are agreeing with the United States. One cause is what I might call historiographic imperialism. The history of the postwar period has been extravagantly US-centric, largely written by Americans and only from American archives. This distorted version of history confirms the mistaken view that the Americans alone set up and ran the UN and NATO, bossed the world economy and determined the rise and fall of regimes from Chile to Iran. In the more romantic versions, both pro- and anti-American, world government has at last been achieved in the CIA. This kind of history is not necessarily chauvinist. The worst offenders are the American revisionists who see their country not as God but as Devil. As Raymond Aron has put it: "In saddling the US with causal responsibility for the Cold War the revisionists once more succumb to the myth of American omnipotence."

There is reason to question whether the world's greatest



debtor can sustain the kind of hegemony it has heretofore wielded in international economic bodies. Will the IMF be obliged to haul the US before them to prescribe austerity measures as it has done for other countries that cannot pay their debts, such as Brazil or Jamaica? When the US had a very favorable balance of trade and payments it could afford the magnanimity required of a hegemon state. It approaches the new GATT round not as the stimulator of world trade but as another member desperately in need of markets to pay off its foreign debtors. It has all happened quickly, and, as William Diebold has said, "The internationalization of the American economy has outgrown people's understanding of its implications." (It is easy to mistake a cycle for the future.) Whatever its relative decline, the United States remains a very wealthy country, and the imperial tradition fades slowly. The US dollar remains the world's reserve currency. The country has, however, become so enmeshed in the imperialism of interdependence that a retreat into isolation (with or without Canada in fortress America) seems inconceivable. It cannot do without the give-and-take of multinational rules and regulations. The xenophobic protectionism that incites Congress is self-defeating, because it will provoke retaliation and mire the US even further in debt. Austerity does not inspire magnanimity as prosperity did, but vulnerability just might make the Americans better partners.

The future lies in either more effective multinational collaboration or anarchy, a fact that the Reagan administration seems to understand better than Congress. If the United States can no longer play the confident hegemon, there is no other power that can. The Japanese have lacked the necessary sense of responsibility for the community, although their increased contributions, financial and diplomatic, to UN bodies in a time of American petulance is encouraging. The European Community has not the unity to be a flexible and generous leader and stands in the way of its more powerful members acting as such. Another major player is looming. The Soviet Union is letting it be known in various ways that it wants to swim out into the world economy and join the international clubs. China is likewise interested.

To reject this kind of initiative by communist powers